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St. Mary's Newton

The Feast of the Epiphany Year C:

5 January 2025

Today we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany. The feast itself revolves around the magi letting something outside of themselves– a star– guide them – literally, to Bethlehem, metaphorically, towards God. I appreciate that they have a very obvious part in this journey in that the star is there and then they have to notice it and then choose to do something about it– in this case, take a courageous, wondrous journey. Most people, both then and now, are not going to drop everything and take a journey to we don't know where to do we don't know what. The good news is, we don't actually have to, which is what star words are built upon. The idea is we don't look through them and pick the one we want but keep whichever one we randomly choose.

Arthur felt that he was lucky since he got the word "courage." Courage is something we all generally need, and Arthur felt that was true about himself, too. He taped his star to his Waltham art studios parking pass next to the rear view mirror in his Toyota Corolla. It lasted almost the whole year, and just seeing it daily ended up being helpful for him.

Ariel has this large, 2'x3', 12 month calendar on a wall in front of and above his work desk monitors. His Star Word is clipped to it so he sees it each time he looks at the calendar which is a lot of times per day. Each morning, Ariel meditates and prays with a spreadsheet, using prompts. To this daily process, he added his 2024 Star Word: Wonder. And so he had to come up with three responses on how God has moved through, around, or in connection with that word for him. For Ariel, now that his brain is now subconsciously looking for how God has expressed/is expressing himself through "Wonder", he reports see more beauty, good, grace, love, happiness, joy, fellowship, gratitude, overabundance, and the faith, what he has started calling "Wonder-Moments" sometimes multiple times a day. The Star Word has been special to him and has added an outwardly looking spiritual dimension to his morning routine, which he previously felt to be more inwardly looking for him.

Andy's star word last year was REST. At first, he writes, it seemed to be a strange word, given that he had nothing to do except look for work. He had all the free time in the world. He could sleep to any hour of the day, stay out as late as he wanted. This kind of rest was not helpful for him, even detrimental, so Andy sought another way. He chose to build some structure into his life through slowly and thoughtfully reintroducing a former love of piano playing, which had once been central in his life, which he had been forced to walk away from 30 years ago. Ironically, the discipline required encouraged and enabled Andy's rest. In particular, he needed to stretch in order to play, which requires an amount of physical relaxation, and the stretching became an avenue to invite breath prayer in. Andy's star word demonstrates how keeping a word that seems unhelpful at best, mean or cruel at worst, may sometimes be the word we need.

So today we are all getting a star word. Star words are more of an intention to consider a particular aspect of our spiritual journeys that the divine might be inviting us into in a new way. Put your word somewhere you'll see it often – wallet, bathroom mirror, lockscreen, wall at work, parking pass, large wall calendar– and just see what happens. They are more an invitation to observe and notice than anything else. No one has to. Anyone may. My only caveat is this: If anyone notices it is making them feel guilt or shame, just recycle it. It's meant to be an invitation, not yet another way to beat ourselves up or yet another thing to do, so if that's happening to you, get rid of it.

There's a form on the bulletin for you to fill out now if you want to and if you're able. What is your star word? What does it mean to you right now? It could be the literal definition or something in your own words. Where do you remember showing up for you before, if at all? I could be something big and milestone-y, and it could also be something seemingly banal. Put it in the offering plate during the offertory. I am going to put them away and mail them to you later in the year, something between June and September-ish.

At the end of the time, if you haven't finished yet, or if you need to complete this in a different way because writing isn't working for you, that is fine. You can bring it back and put it on the offering plate on any Sunday. You can send it to me via email; I did a fillable form of it in the e-newsletter.

The magi symbolize one of Luke's themes, which is extending the invitation of God to more folks. Star wars are a riff on that, in that they ask us to wonder about the divine in various areas of our life. Where might God be guiding us now?